

# *Documents on Diplomacy: The Source*

## *The Moral Force of Justice*

*A Speech by President Truman at the Opening of the United Nations, April 22, 1945*

**T**he world has experienced a revival of an old faith in the everlasting moral force of justice. At no time in history has there been a more important conference, nor a more necessary meeting, than this one in San Francisco, which you are opening today.

On behalf of the American people, I extend to you a most hearty welcome.

President Roosevelt appointed an able Delegation to represent the United States. I have complete confidence in its chairman, Secretary of State Stettinius, and in his distinguished colleagues, former Secretary Cordell Hull, Senator Connally, Senator Vandenberg, Representative Bloom and Representative Eaton, Governor Stassen, and Dean Gildersleeve.

They have my confidence. They have my support.

In the name of a great humanitarian—one who surely is with us today in spirit—I earnestly appeal to each and every one of you to rise above personal interests and adhere to those lofty principles which benefit all mankind.

Franklin D. Roosevelt gave his life while trying to perpetuate these high ideals. This Conference owes its existence, in a large part, to the vision and foresight and determination of Franklin Roosevelt.

Each of you can remember other courageous champions, who also made the supreme sacrifice, serving under your flag. They gave their lives so that others might live in security. They died to insure justice. We must work and live to guarantee justice-for all.

You members of this Conference are to be the architects of the better world. In your hands rests our future. By your labors at this Conference, we shall know if suffering humanity is to achieve a just and lasting peace.

Let us labor to achieve a peace which is really worthy of their great sacrifice. We must make certain, by your work here, that another war will be impossible.

We who have lived through the torture and the tragedy of two world conflicts must realize the magnitude of the problem before us. We do not need far-sighted vision to understand the trend in recent history. Its significance is all too clear.

With ever-increasing brutality and destruction, modern warfare, if unchecked, would ultimately crush all civilization. We still have a choice between the alternatives: The continuation of international chaos, or the establishment of a world organization for the enforcement of peace.

It is not the purpose of this Conference to draft a treaty of peace in the old sense of that term. It is not our assignment to settle specific questions of territories, boundaries, citizenship, and reparations.

This Conference will devote its energies and its labors exclusively to the single problem of setting up the essential organization to keep the peace. You are to write the fundamental charter.

Our sole objective, at this decisive gathering, is to create the structure. We must provide the machinery which will make future peace not only possible but certain.

The construction of this delicate machine is far more complicated than drawing boundary lines on a map, or estimating fair reparations, or placing reasonable limits upon armaments. Your task must be completed first.

We represent the overwhelming majority of all mankind. We speak for people who have endured the most savage and devastating war ever inflicted upon innocent men, women, and children.

We hold a powerful mandate from our people. They believe we will fulfill this obligation. We must prevent, if human mind, heart, and hope can prevent it, the repetition of the disaster from which the entire world will suffer for years to come.

If we should pay merely lip service to inspiring ideals, and later do violence to simple justice, we would draw down upon us the bitter wrath of generations yet unborn.

We must not continue to sacrifice the flower of our youth merely to check madmen, those who in every age plan world domination. The sacrifices of our youth today must lead, through your efforts, to the building for tomorrow of a mighty combination of nations founded upon justice for peace.

Justice remains the greatest power on earth.

To that tremendous power alone will we submit.

Nine days ago, I told the Congress of the United States, and I now repeat it to you:

*"Nothing is more essential to the future peace of the world than continued cooperation of the nations which had to muster the force necessary to defeat the conspiracy of the Axis powers to dominate the world."*

*"While these great states have a special responsibility to enforce the peace, their responsibility is based upon the obligations resting upon all states, large and small, not to use force in international relations except in the defense of law. The responsibility of the great states is to serve and not dominate the peoples of the world."*

None of us doubt that with Divine guidance, friendly cooperation, and hard work we shall find an adequate answer to the problem history has put before us.

Realizing the scope of our task and the imperative need for success, we proceed with humility and determination.

By harmonious cooperation, the United Nations repelled the onslaught of the greatest aggregation of military force that was ever assembled in the long history of aggression. Every nation now fighting for freedom is giving according to its ability and opportunity.

We fully realize today that victory in war requires a mighty united effort. Certainly, victory in peace calls for, and must receive, an equal effort.

Man has learned long ago that it is impossible to live unto himself. This same basic principle applies today to nations. We were not isolated during the war. We dare not become isolated in peace.

All will concede that in order to have good neighbors we must also be good neighbors. That applies in every field of human endeavor.

For lasting security, men of good-will must unite and organize. Moreover, if our friendly policies should ever be considered by belligerent leaders as merely evidence of weakness, the Organization we establish must be adequately prepared to meet any challenge.

Differences between men, and between nations, will always remain. In fact, if held within reasonable limits, such disagreements are actually wholesome. All progress begins with differences of opinion and moves onward as the differences are adjusted through reason and mutual understanding.

In recent years, our enemies have clearly demonstrated the disaster which follows when freedom of thought is no longer tolerated. Honest minds cannot long be regimented without protest.

The essence of our problem here is to provide sensible machinery for the settlement of disputes among nations. Without this, peace cannot exist. We can no longer permit any nation, or group of nations, to attempt to settle their arguments with bombs and bayonets.

If we continue to abide by such decisions, we will be forced to accept the fundamental philosophy of our enemies, namely, that "Might Makes Right." To deny this premise, and we most certainly do, we are obliged to provide the necessary means to refute it. Words are not enough.

We must, once and for all, reverse the order, and prove by our acts conclusively that Right Has Might.

If we do not want to die together in war, we must learn to live together in peace.

With firm faith in our hearts, to sustain us along the hard road to victory, we will find our way to a secure peace, for the ultimate benefit of all humanity.

We must build a new world—a far better world—one in which the eternal dignity of man is respected.

As we are about to undertake our heavy duties, we beseech Almighty God to guide us in building a permanent monument to those who gave their lives that this moment might come.

May He lead our steps in His own righteous path of peace. ■

### *Source*

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Source: United States Department of State *Bulletin*

<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450425a.html>